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## Clean Air Act Overview

# Title IV - Noise Pollution

The 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments added a new title IV, relating to acid deposition control, *without repealing the existing title IV, relating to noise pollution*. The U.S. Code designates the original title IV (noise pollution) as subchapter IV and the new title IV (acid deposition control) as subchapter IV-A.

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## What is Noise Pollution?

**The traditional definition of noise is “unwanted or disturbing sound”.** Sound becomes unwanted when it either interferes with normal activities such as sleeping, conversation, or disrupts or diminishes one’s quality of life. The fact that you can’t see, taste or smell it may help explain why it has not received as much attention as other types of pollution, such as air pollution, or water pollution. The air around us is constantly filled with sounds, yet most of us would probably not say we are surrounded by noise. Though for some, the persistent and escalating sources of sound can often be considered an annoyance. This “annoyance” can have major consequences, primarily to one’s overall health.

## Health Effects

Noise pollution adversely affects the lives of millions of people. Studies have shown that there are direct links between noise and health. Problems related to noise include stress related illnesses, high blood pressure, speech interference, hearing loss, sleep disruption, and lost productivity. Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) is the most common and often discussed health effect, but research has shown that exposure to constant or high levels of noise can cause countless adverse health affects.

Learn more about the health effects:

The Noise Effects Handbook, **Office of Noise Abatement and Control**, US EPA, 1981 [Exit](#)  
Noise and Its Effects, by Dr. Alice H. Suter, Administrative Conference of the United States, November 1991 [Exit](#)

## Protection from Noise

Individuals can take many steps to protect themselves from the harmful effects of noise pollution. If people must be around loud sounds, they can protect their ears with hearing protection (e.g., ear plugs or ear muffs). There are various strategies for combating noise in your home, school, workplace, and the community.

Learn more about noise pollution prevention:  
Noise Pollution Clearinghouse [Exit](#)

## The Role of EPA

Under the Clean Air Act, the EPA administrator established the Office of Noise Abatement and Control (ONAC) to carry out investigations and studies on noise and its effect on the public health and welfare. Through ONAC, the EPA coordinated all Federal noise control activities, but in 1981 the Administration concluded that noise issues were best handled at the State and local level. As a result, ONAC was closed and primary responsibility of addressing noise issues was transferred to State and local governments. However, EPA retains authority to investigate and study noise and its effect, disseminate information to the public regarding noise pollution and its adverse health effects, respond to inquiries on matters related to noise, and evaluate the effectiveness of existing regulations for protecting the public health and welfare, pursuant to the Noise Control Act of 1972 and the Quiet Communities Act of 1978.

Learn more about the Clean Air Act, Noise Control Act of 1972, and the Quiet Communities Act of 1978:

Clean Air Act (Title IV – Noise Pollution)

The Noise Control Act of 1972 (42USC7641) (21 pp, 890K, About PDF), from U.S. General Services Administration (GSA)

The Quiet Communities Act of 1978 [Exit](#)

## Noise Sources Regulated by EPA

EPA or a designated Federal agency regulates noise sources, such as rail and motor carriers, low noise emission products, construction equipment, transport equipment, trucks, motorcycles, and the labeling of hearing protection devices. For additional information, see EPA's Public Access Environmental Knowledgebase.

## Past Activities

Learn more about these activities:

- Press Release Announcing the Establishment of a Noise Labeling Program (1979)
- EPA Workshop on Hearing Protection Devices (PDF) (212 pp, 5.1 MB) - March 27-28, 2003, Noise Pollution Clearinghouse [Exit](#)
- EPA Docket (#OAR-2003-0024) Labeling of Hearing Protection Devices
- Noise Pollution Clearinghouse [Exit](#)

- Fact Sheet - Proposed Revisions to the Product Noise Labeling Regulation for Hearing Protection Devices
- Federal Register Notice - Proposed Revisions to the Product Noise Labeling Regulation for Hearing Protection Devices - August 5, 2009

## Frequently Asked Questions

EPA is usually the first line of contact when there are questions regarding noise pollution. However, the roles have shifted and State and local governments have acquired the responsibility of responding to many noise pollution matters.

For State Environmental Agencies, see EPA's Health and Environmental Agencies of U.S. States and Territories webpage.

Some of the commonly asked questions from the public relate to noises in the community (from your neighbor, boom cars, lawn equipment, etc.) and from commercial businesses (factory, auto mechanic shop, etc.), aviation, railroad/locomotive horn noise, and interstate motor carrier.

For answers, see EPA's Public Access Environmental Knowledgebase.

## Resource Center

To learn more about noise and the adverse health effects of noise exposure, tools for children and teachers, conferences and workshops, and much more, please visit the following

organizations. The following links exit the site [Exit](#)

- Noise Pollution Clearinghouse
- Noise Off
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
- Center for Hearing and Communication (formerly the League for the Hard of Hearing)
- National Hearing Conservation Association
- Council for Accreditation in Occupational Hearing Conservation
- American Academy of Audiology
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Hearing Protector Device Compendium

## For Kids and Teachers

- Noise Pollution Materials for Kids and Teachers - includes coloring books and information brochures suitable for children and educators.
- Related web sites The following links exit the site [Exit](#)
  - Dangerous Decibels
  - American Speech-Language Hearing Association Ear Bud Campaign
  - National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders
  - National Hearing Conservation Association

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**Last updated on July 12, 2016**

**42 U.S.C.**

United States Code, 2013 Edition

Title 42 - THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELFARE

CHAPTER 85 - AIR POLLUTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

SUBCHAPTER IV - NOISE POLLUTION

Sec. 7641 - Noise abatement

From the U.S. Government Publishing Office, [www.gpo.gov](http://www.gpo.gov)**§7641. Noise abatement****(a) Office of Noise Abatement and Control**

The Administrator shall establish within the Environmental Protection Agency an Office of Noise Abatement and Control, and shall carry out through such Office a full and complete investigation and study of noise and its effect on the public health and welfare in order to (1) identify and classify causes and sources of noise, and (2) determine—

- (A) effects at various levels;
- (B) projected growth of noise levels in urban areas through the year 2000;
- (C) the psychological and physiological effect on humans;
- (D) effects of sporadic extreme noise (such as jet noise near airports) as compared with constant noise;
- (E) effect on wildlife and property (including values);
- (F) effect of sonic booms on property (including values); and
- (G) such other matters as may be of interest in the public welfare.

**(b) Investigation techniques; report and recommendations**

In conducting such investigation, the Administrator shall hold public hearings, conduct research, experiments, demonstrations, and studies. The Administrator shall report the results of such investigation and study, together with his recommendations for legislation or other action, to the President and the Congress not later than one year after December 31, 1970.

**(c) Abatement of noise from Federal activities**

In any case where any Federal department or agency is carrying out or sponsoring any activity resulting in noise which the Administrator determines amounts to a public nuisance or is otherwise objectionable, such department or agency shall consult with the Administrator to determine possible means of abating such noise.

(July 14, 1955, ch. 360, title IV, §402, as added Pub. L. 91-604, §14, Dec. 31, 1970, 84 Stat. 1709.)

**CODIFICATION**

Another section 402 of act July 14, 1955, as added by Pub. L. 101-549, title IV, §401, Nov. 15, 1990, 104 Stat. 2585, is classified to section 7651a of this title.

Section was formerly classified to section 1858 of this title.

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Title 42 - THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELFARE

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Sec. 7642 - Authorization of appropriations

From the U.S. Government Publishing Office, [www.gpo.gov](http://www.gpo.gov)**§7642. Authorization of appropriations**

There is authorized to be appropriated such amount, not to exceed \$30,000,000, as may be necessary for the purposes of this subchapter.

(July 14, 1955, ch. 360, title IV, §403, as added Pub. L. 91-604, §14, Dec. 31, 1970, 84 Stat. 1710.)

**CODIFICATION**

Another section 403 of act July 14, 1955, as added by Pub. L. 101-549, title IV, §401, Nov. 15, 1990, 104 Stat. 2589, is classified to section 7651b of this title.

Section was formerly classified to section 1858a of this title.